

Senator

Mark Doumit

19th Legislative District

Spring 2003



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Dear Friends:

This year, state legislators faced a long list of challenges as we worked to get the state economy back on track, and get people back to work.

These are tough times for many families trying to make ends meet in the shadow of a lingering recession and high unemployment. My goal this session was to pass legislation that would give some much-needed relief to small businesses, and help create new jobs. I supported reforms that will help get the burden of over-regulation off people's backs. And I supported investments in local infrastructure to attract new businesses and new jobs.

This newsletter covers issues that directly affect families in the 19th District. As always, I welcome your comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark L. Doumit".

Senator Mark Doumit
19th District



Budget



About three weeks into session, I was invited to join the budget-writing Senate Ways and Means Committee. With the state facing a \$2.6 billion budget shortfall, this was one of the most difficult budget-writing sessions in recent history.

The budget shortfall forced us to make tough decisions on revenue increases and cuts to state services. The areas of education, higher education, and health care were hit particularly hard.

I was especially disappointed that the Senate budget did not fund two education initiatives passed overwhelmingly by the voters to reduce class sizes, improve public schools, and provide teachers with cost-of-living increases. The Senate's failure to fund these voter-approved initiatives was one of the main reasons why I twice voted against the extreme Senate budget.

Ultimately, the Legislature passed a more reasonable, bipartisan, compromise budget that keeps the state moving forward.

Natural Resources

The past few years have been pretty tough on families that earn their livings outdoors. Small-forest landowners, farmers and fishers have been hit hard by the burdens of over-regulation. That's why I have continued working with my colleagues in the House and Senate to pass common-sense reforms that help ease the burden of the state's heavy-handed regulatory system.

First and foremost, we passed legislation to fix some of the shortcomings of the 1999 Forest and Fish Law. The bill we passed this year will simplify the planning process for harvesting trees, and will help secure public funding to repair culverts that pass under logging roads. This helps small-forest landowners stay in business, and keeps environmental protections in place.

We also passed legislation that will stop the state Department of Fish and Wildlife's (DFW) plan to flood low-lying coastal farm fields by installing self-regulating tidegates. The DFW's goal was to expand salmon habitat, but the plan pitted fish against farms and would have drowned acres of successful family farms beneath gallons of salt water. The bill we passed prohibits the department from requiring the installation of tidegates.

Another threat we wanted to confront was a situation where fishers could lose all their fishing licenses — essentially losing their whole livelihood — if they committed a single fishing violation. We passed a bill that sets up a license suspension review committee, giving the DFW an enforcement mechanism to punish chronic violators without destroying the livelihoods of people who just happen to make a mistake.

Finally, we passed a bill that allows fishers to sell their sturgeon, salmon and crab catches directly to the public. This is a win for fishers who will be able to sell directly to retail shoppers and restaurants, and for members of the public who can now buy fresh seafood directly from the people who caught it.

Jobs Package

One of our biggest bipartisan victories this year was passing a construction budget that will not only create 14,500 jobs statewide, but will also stoke local economies through investments in public schools, state parks, local colleges and other public facilities.

Some of the projects in our region include:

- \$2 million to design a new fine arts building on the Lower Columbia College campus in Longview, with a commitment to begin construction during the next budget cycle;
- renovating the main museum interior at the Ilwaco Heritage Foundation;
- developing the campground at Grayland Beach, and leveling and raising campsites and roads above flood level at the South Beach area; and
- replacing the run-down concession store and park office at Fort Canby, renovating Colbert House and restoring North Head Lighthouse.

The construction budget also includes funding to design a new lab and classroom facility at Grays Harbor College. This will help the college accommodate more students in high-demand science programs, so we can meet the needs of business and industry.



Flood Control

Another victory for local communities is a bill that lets people elect their own board of supervisors for their local flood-control district.

Before the bill was passed, these boards were made up of county officials, who may or may not have lived near the area's flood zones. We felt the best decisions would come from local people who live in the district, walk the dikes and know the streams. Constituents from Cowlitz County, including county commissioners and the local flood control committee members, requested the bill. Both groups believe local people can be served better if they are allowed to elect their own board of supervisors.

Economic Development

One of my proudest victories this year, was a bill that will help rev up the economic engine in coastal towns.

The bill frees developers from the rigmarole of the state's environmental permitting appeals process by consolidating four appeals boards down to one that deals only with economic development in distressed counties.

The idea for the bill, a top priority for the Grays Harbor business community and the Port of Grays Harbor, came about after a developer ran into problems securing permits for a golf course it planned to build along a shoreline in Grays Harbor. The project is expected to create 30 or more jobs, but it has been mired in permitting appeals.

Because big construction projects usually require multiple permits, all with their own review processes, many developers were discouraged by the original process of applying for permits and appealing decisions. Now, with this bill in place, we can hopefully make things a little easier, so projects like this golf course can be completed on time, creating jobs and generating tourism dollars for our local communities.

The bill passed overwhelmingly out of the House and Senate thanks to the hard work of a broad coalition of lawmakers from coastal communities, and the effort of business and environmental groups, and state agencies.

Transportation

When voters rejected Referendum 51 last November, state lawmakers faced a unique challenge.

We knew it was unacceptable to just ignore the transportation crisis that threatens our economy. The governor's Competitiveness Council told the Legislature last year that the number one threat to business in our state was the transportation crisis.

At the same time, we had to make the system more accountable to taxpayers. So we put our heads together and rose to the challenge with a plan that pays for investments in highways, rail and transit improvements.

But before any money is collected, there will be rock-solid safeguards in place to make sure your tax dollars go into building projects that have a specific description, location, timeline and cost. To make sure these projects get completed on time, we passed a bipartisan bill calling for strict performance audits that will help ensure citizen involvement and increase public confidence.

The bipartisan transportation plan will put people to work and help get our state economy moving again. Some of the specific projects in our region include:

- \$5 million to build a new bridge across the Cowlitz River in Lexington;
- over \$17 million for dredging the Columbia River shipping lane;
- seismic work on Highway 101 over the Chehalis River bridge;
- paving for state Route 107 from the Chehalis River to SR 12;
- paving for SR 4 from Skamokawa to Interstate 5;
- realignment of Svensen's curve on SR 4; and
- paving for SR 6 and Highway 101 to Pe Ell.



Good Jobs and a Strong Economy

I first came to the Legislature out of concern for workers in rural areas who were in danger of losing their jobs. In the seven years I've served in the Legislature, my number one priority has been protecting rural jobs and growing rural economies.

Job retention and creation is paramount in everyone's mind as the Legislature works to improve the state's business climate for large employers like Boeing, and for main street businesses that keep our small towns vibrant. Some of the issues we've focused on include:

- unemployment insurance reform;
- worker's compensation reform; and
- environmental permit streamlining, including a bill I sponsored to improve the efficiency and predictability of the hydraulic permitting process.

I am especially proud of the work we did this session to streamline the environmental permitting process. With a less heavy-handed regulatory system, we will make permitting more responsive to the general public.

As always, the best ideas come from local folks who grow the trees, tend the fields, run the businesses, and work the jobs that keep our state economy on track. I've always believed that a good job solves a lot of the problems we see in our society. I look forward to hearing from you.



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